



# Thomas Report



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E-NEWS

## COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Finance & Audit  
(Vice-Chair)

Economic &  
Community  
Development

Transportation,  
Public Works,  
& Transit

## YOUR OPINION COUNTS

Please call me or  
send me an email  
with your thoughts.

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*To a Happy and Prosperous Year: I'm pleased to bring you this Winter 2010 edition of my E-Newsletter. I hope you and your family's holiday season – whether a celebration of Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa – found you and your loved ones in good health and brought you some real cheer. For those who have experienced tough times, whether in body, mind, or pocketbook, I hope your situation improves. If there is a way the County can help, please feel free to contact me. The items in this E-Newsletter address events and issues in our district and countywide. If you have an opinion or comment about any of them, please bring it to my attention. I wish all my constituents a happy and prosperous year.*

## Record-Breaking Audience at Feingold Session

Senator Russ Feingold is noted for having held many hundreds of in-person listening sessions, including one in every county in Wisconsin each year. Talking with Sen. Feingold early last summer, Supervisor Thomas noted that he had never seen the Senator in the 18<sup>th</sup> District. Soon, the Senator's staff was making inquiries about possible venues in the district. By early September, the Senator had taken the Supervisor's cue and decided upon Vincent High School.

On September 18, area residents filled most of the seats in the Vincent auditorium. After the Senator's brief summary of issues, several dozen members of the audience posed questions to him, nearly all relating to health care. Unlike recent meetings held by other senators and congresspersons around the US, the audience was respectful to a fault.

Senator Feingold's staff noted that it was the largest crowd ever to attend a Feingold listening session.

"I'm grateful to Sen. Feingold," said Sup. Thomas, "for coming to our part of the county to hear our voices. It was time well spent. He is a tireless advocate for the concerns and needs of the people of Milwaukee County and, we can be sure, the people of the 18<sup>th</sup> District. I also thank Matthew Boswell, the principal at Vincent High School, for having us there while school was in session and allowing students the opportunity to observe democracy in action."

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## Lindsay Park Fair Rocked and Will Rock Again

Preparations have begun for the **2010 Lindsay Park Neighborhood Fair and Concert** in District 18 on Saturday, August 14. Supervisor Thomas expressed his gratitude for those who helped put on last year's event: "I'm thankful for the volunteers from the many groups who participated last August in our 2009 Neighborhood Fair and Concert in Lindsay Park. I very much appreciate the City and County employees without whose work the 'show' could not have gone on. I feel honored that we attracted major donations from several corporate sponsors and thankful for the contributions of food and prizes from Northwest Side businesses. And I appreciate the musical talent and the friendliness of the Eddie Butts Band."

All these people played very positive roles in making the day a success. The community was well served by their presence, whether as spokespersons for their organizations or providers of the food and fun. They came together in harmony with the people of the neighborhood. Our hope is that the publicity generated by the various presenters at the fair would result in well-deserved increases in participation in their programs.

From lunch-line donations, we raised \$110.00 and 340 pounds of non-perishable food items that day, all of which were donated to the Hunger Task Force. We estimated the crowd at well over 300. This year's fair and concert will be bigger and better, yet it will still be inexpensive fun for the whole family. As the date draws nearer, more information will be posted on this website.



**Left:** Folks made themselves comfortable at the picnic tables. **Right:** The boys and girls from Cho's Tae Kwon Do showed how they fly through the air, breaking boards with their bare feet



**Left:** Milwaukee Police Officers demonstrated their equipment, especially for the kids.  
**Right:** In line, waiting for burgers and dogs, very inexpensively.



**Left:** The Eddie Butts Band invited boys and girls to join them on stage.  
**Right:** Staff and students from Kaplan College were among the many organizations who took part.

## Our Transit System: Troubles and Opportunities

**The County Executive has eliminated live agents** from the Milwaukee County Transit System's portion of the 2010 County Budget – a move that I opposed. Twenty-four-hour telephone access to a live agent for schedule and route information at 344-6711 is no longer available. That number now provides information by an automated key-press system only. Riders with questions have to listen and respond to options on various menus.

While using the automated system may be an inconvenience to some riders, including visitors to Milwaukee County, it is particularly difficult for persons who are visually impaired. Anticipating that some people will be unable to use the automated system, MCTS employees at the bus company's main office number, **344-4550**, have agreed to provide route and schedule assistance in addition to their regular duties. And they have now been trained to do so. However, they are available only during regular business hours, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM on weekdays – not on weekends, holidays, or furlough days.

Access to route and schedule information on your computer has not changed. Go to **[www.RideMCTS.com](http://www.RideMCTS.com)**, the transit website. Also, printed schedules are available at government offices, universities, some malls, a small number of stand-alone stores, and on buses.



**Tell your state legislators to allow a half-cent sales tax to pay for transit.** Milwaukee County taxpayers have already voted to do this, removing transit from the property tax. But the Legislature still won't allow it! Tell them we need more funding for transit without raising property taxes or cutting into other important services such as the parks, the courts, or mental health services.

To locate and contact your state legislators, go to **[www.milwaukee.gov](http://www.milwaukee.gov)**. Click on **City of Milwaukee**, then click on **Find My Representatives**.

**A new opportunity to improve transit.** I have been pleased to accept appointment by Chairman Lee Holloway to the Transportation and Public Works (TPW) Committee. Serving on the TPW committee, I will be closer to several issues I have already been working on, including: (1) improvement of the Milwaukee County Transit System and (2) development of cooperative transit arrangements between Milwaukee County and its adjacent counties in a Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). My goal is to have efficient, affordable public transportation in Milwaukee County, with smooth connections to well-planned systems in areas outside the county, such as Madison, Kenosha, and Chicago. In a well-integrated transportation system, anyone can get from their residential area to work, school, shopping, etc., with little or no driving because there are convenient connections to bus, rail, light rail, and air travel.

Legislation being considered in Madison would (1) allow for creation of an RTA, (2) authorize a dedicated funding stream for mass transit in Milwaukee County, (3) provide property tax relief to Milwaukee County residents, and (4) increase the state's chances of winning federal approval of Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail.

I continue to be a member of the Economic and Community Development Committee and Vice Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee. To join the TPW Committee, I have left the County Board's Personnel Committee. On that committee, I learned a great deal about County employment policies and practices and the difficult process of negotiating union labor contracts that both ensure the County will get the services we need and provide fair wages and benefits and optimal working conditions for represented and non-represented County employees.

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#### **Bus Route & Schedule Information**

- 24-hour automated info using a **telephone keypad at 344-6711**.
  - 24-hour automated info using a **computer at [www.RideMCTS.com](http://www.RideMCTS.com)**.
  - 8:00 – 4:30 except weekends, holidays, or furlough days, **live telephone assistance at 344-4550**.
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## Planning Beyond Tomorrow

Just as in business, when governments make financial decisions, they must keep in mind not only the present situation and the immediate future but the more distant future, as well. Planning for situations that are likely to exist or could possibly exist several years in advance is known as *strategic planning*. Because of his interest in strategic planning, Sup. Thomas has been named by County Board Chairman Lee Holloway to the recently formed Long Range Strategic Plan Steering Committee.

The committee is charged, on the outflow side of the ledger, with taking the major costs such as pension and health benefits and bond interest payments and projecting their change over the next five years. On the income side, the committee projects the likely amounts of revenues, including land sales and other kinds of income, over the five-year period. The committee will then explore and identify other possible sources of funds to balance the projected budgets. The assistance of experienced County staff is invaluable in these efforts.

Serving on the committee with Sup. Thomas are Supervisors Pat Jursik (Chair) and Lynne De Bruin, Richard Abelson (AFSCME District Council 48), Cynthia Archer (Dept. of Administration), Rob Henken (Public Policy Forum), Lisa Jo Marks (Dept. of Health & Human Services), Tim Sheehy (MMAC), Stephanie Stein (Dept. on Aging).

Recognizing the need for strategic planning for the massive County Budget, Supervisor Thomas is developing a proposal, a [Road Map](#), that will suggest creative yet solid ways Milwaukee County can approach its fiscal challenges. His proposal will enable the County to support programs mandated by the state and to provide services that constituents have come to expect. The proposal will add up to a wise investment in Milwaukee County that will sustain us into the future.

To download the proposal, click here on the [Road Map](#).

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## Representing You in the Media

Supervisor Thomas has recently appeared on several TV and radio programs as your representative in county government as well as the Vice Chair of the County's Finance and Audit Committee.

On several occasions, Sup. Thomas has joined afternoon host Earl Ingram on WMCS-AM 1290 radio to discuss county issues, including the County budget, transit and the Regional Transit Authority, the quality of life of his constituents, and the future of Milwaukee County.

In December the Supervisor took part in a television interview on Wisconsin Eye, [www.wiseye.org](http://www.wiseye.org), as part of a feature on the financial issues of local Wisconsin governments. County and other local governments are tied into a system that many have called "broken," in

which they must rely on property taxes and on shared-revenue payments from the state to pay for critical programs. Sup. Thomas took part in a six-person roundtable that also included Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk. Sup. Thomas explained his "[Road Map](#) for the Future of Milwaukee County," an outline covering what he considers to be the most important categories of action the County should take in order to become and remain financially stable over the next five to ten years. (See previous article on long-term planning.)

Wisconsin Eye, a service begun in 2007, is becoming an important journalistic fixture in the state. The organization monitors the activities of government (and politicians) in Wisconsin much as C-SPAN covers them on the national scene. With fixed cameras mounted in the two chambers of the Legislature and in other meeting places throughout the State Capitol building, Wisconsin Eye is at times the "medium of record" for the events of our state government. Unfortunately, Time Warner Cable has chosen to drop Wisconsin Eye's nonprofit public-service broadcasting from its channels. But you can still watch Sup. Thomas' interview via the internet. To find it, follow these steps:

1. Go to **[www.wiseye.org](http://www.wiseye.org)**.
2. Click on **Video Archive**.
3. Click on **WisEye Series**.
4. Click on **Newsmakers**.
5. Search for or scroll down to **12.14.09 / Newsmakers: Surviving the Recession** and see the second entry for that date.
6. Click on **Watch**.


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## Supporting the Arts

The Mitchell Park Domes, one of the jewels of Milwaukee County's award-winning park system, recently served as the venue for Ko-Thi Dance Company's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary performance. Congresswoman Gwen Moore and Supervisor John Thomas were both in the audience that night as Ko-Thi proved they are at the top of their game. The Company rocked the Domes with drumming from Ton Ko-Thi (the children's ensemble), the Women's Drum Ensemble, other adult drumming ensembles, and the cutest demonstration from the 5-through-8-year-old fall studio class. This company flies even without dancing!

One highlight of the event was a 20-minute documentary produced by board member Sharon Williams and photographer-filmmaker Dena Aronson, taking the audience back to alumni interviews and snippets of the Company's past 40 years. It was an opportunity to see some of the impact Ko-Thi has had on our community through the years.

Another major artistic tribute that evening came with the unveiling of a one-of-a-kind quilt, commissioned by the Ko-Thi Board of Directors from quilt artist Ethel White in honor of Ferne Yangyeitie Caulker, founder of the Company. Using the Ghanaian Idinka symbol for the 'ferne' plant, the quilt expresses the spirit and leadership qualities of Ferne Caulker.



The event was underwritten by Wisconsin Energy Foundation. The Dance Company also initiated its fundraising opportunity for supporters to pledge monthly debit donations in a partnership with National City Bank. Supervisor Thomas takes pride in supporting Ko-Thi through his personal financial contribution and service on their board.

For the first half of 2010, Performances by Ko-Thi and its youth ensemble have been scheduled at Bayshore Town Center, UWM's Peck School of the Arts, the Lincoln Center (Middle School) for the Arts, the Hamilton Fine Arts Center in Sussex, and more. Ko-Thi is holding classes in dance and drumming this spring and summer. Visit the web site, **[www.ko-thi.org](http://www.ko-thi.org)**, or call 273-0676 for more information about classes and upcoming programs or to help support their fine programs.

**END**